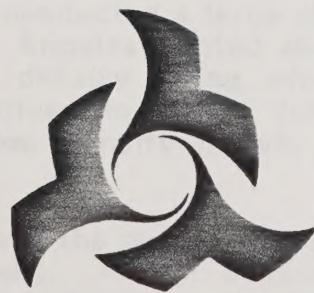


85 02017

CENTERS IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM  
INFORMATION DOCUMENT

# HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES 1781-2001



LOS ANGELES CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MARCH 1983



THE HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES 1781-2001  
(. . . A History Which, With Your Help, Can Have  
A Happier Ending. . .)

- How a great city came to be synonymous with a unique, casual, highly mobile, fun and sun-oriented life style,
- How the city was defeated at all attempts to bridle, guide or control its growth,
- And how -- to its own consternation -- in the 21st century an involuntary process of congestion and pollution not only came to limit its growth but also destroyed the very life style that had made it so attractive . . .

1781-1982: All of the features that would come to typify the relaxed, informal Los Angeles life-style were in existence almost from the founding of the City in 1781. Los Angeles was the place of new beginnings and opportunities. The attraction of temperate weather brought a growing population that spread out within the basin helped by the development of water and the red car lines in the early part of the 20th century. After World War II great suburban subdivisions were constructed and linked together by freeways which came to personify the life-style in Los Angeles. Continued growth that occurred without the help of any real planning in the 1950's and early 1960's caused local residents to seek ways to better respond to development pressure.

In the middle 1960's, the City conducted a large citizen survey of 50,000 people that indicated residents of Los Angeles wanted above all else to maintain their life-style of mobility and low density living while still permitting growth to occur. Four different alternatives to permit future growth were evaluated: 1) low growth, 2) continued low density growth, 3) corridor growth, and 4) growth in "centers".

After extensive public discussion, the majority of the citizens expressed strong support for the centers concept. Formal adoption of Concept Los Angeles containing the public's preferred choice by the Planning Commission, the City Council and Mayor occurred in 1974. These city officials all agreed with the citizens that future development in centers made the most sense for a city growth policy which would protect and enhance our quality of life.

As planned, centers would be concentrations of mixed land use -- jobs, housing, shopping, entertainment and compatible industry -- served by improved public transit. All centers would serve basic community needs. Centers were to be both small and medium size beside a series of large centers.

1982-2001: Work started by the City in 1982 on implementing ways to encourage



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2024 with funding from  
State of California and California State Library

<https://archive.org/details/C124880912>

new development to actually locate in centers. This effort came about when it was realized that a very large amount of growth was still occurring outside centers. The goal of the centers implementation project was to allow the life-style of Los Angeles residents to be preserved in the face of growth pressures which could harm our famous way of life. Work was started to:

1. reduce the excess development potential outside centers, in order to preserve the character of existing neighborhoods, even at the expense of reduction in some potential property values,
2. find public incentives to induce new development to locate in centers in exchange for quality features that would create an attractive urban setting with desirable amenities, and
3. coordinate future public services and facility needs to the requirements of new centers development to achieve a balance.

A proposed set of recommendations to channel development into centers was finally completed, in 1984. Unfortunately, the well intended efforts of the City did not succeed. In fact, all the supporting efforts necessary to encourage centers through the year 2000 failed to achieve their goal. Attempts to roll back excessive development outside centers failed due to political opposition brought to bear on the City Council, which was pressured by property owners fearful of reduced speculation potential on their land. Legislation was introduced in mid 1980's requiring government to pay for any loss in property value it caused. The incentives to build in centers failed because the reduction of development potential outside centers did not occur. Excess growth potential remained outside centers so not enough "bonuses" could be granted to induce development to locate in centers. Furthermore, the idea of a bonus in return for a desirable feature in a project within a center was seen as interference in the private market that would drive growth outside the City. Lastly, the City was unable to balance new development with supporting public facilities due to lack of local tax dollars as capital improvements funds were slashed below pre-Proposition 13 levels.

The effect of this failure to implement centers led to a situation in the early 1990's where continued growth began to seriously harm the traditional Southern California life-style, something the City had tried so hard to avoid. This situation was reached because the City did not remain the same as it was in 1982. In fact, the continuation of existing development patterns led to significant urban problems such as the loss of mobility, continued health dangers from air pollution and neighborhoods threatened by development pressures. Los Angeles began to lose many of the attractive features that made working and living in the City enjoyable. Without encouraging new growth in centers, more development occurred in a random in-fill pattern throughout Los Angeles. The City was forced into adopting serious growth control measures including rationing building permits and a \$5,000 sewer connection fee for each new home as a necessary way to minimize the negative effects of new development. This led to serious problems during the 1980's and 1990's in the following major areas:

- o Continued random development caused by growth outside centers led to more and more congestion for motorists. Shopping for necessary goods and services required more time, effort and aggravation. In



addition, congestion of freeways and streets became seriously snarled. Public transit alternatives could not be expanded in communities that lacked a large centralized mix of workers and residents to justify improved transit. Instead, daily commute times lengthened perceptibly without improved public transit serving centers. Freeway travel slowed to as little as 5 miles per hour. "Weekend commuters" became a new term for those people who stayed in motels by their jobs during the week to avoid major traffic congestion as the rush hour period extended well into the evening. Continued reliance on the auto further worsened air pollution and increased the number of days it was unhealthy to breath the air, especially for children and senior citizens. New jobs and taxes generated by firms starting businesses in Los Angeles were limited by the continued bad air quality as companies chose to locate outside Los Angeles.

- o Housing prices continued to remain unaffordable for many people without the badly needed extra residential construction possible in centers. Low density housing outside centers did not have the possibility for creating affordable units that existed within centers. This lack of affordable housing hurt future new businesses because workers could not afford to live in Los Angeles. Because of a lack of housing affordable to employees, many local new business firms located outside the City and potential tax revenues were lost. City services had to be reduced further because of lost tax base.
- o People found that they could not easily live close to their job because new development did not emphasize balanced residential-commercial development typified by centers. Long commutes remained the norm for many people.
- o Without centers to bring together new employment, housing and social activities, less social integration and daily contact occurred. The rich diversity created by the many groups living in Los Angeles was not shared with others because of the lack of a "focal point" provided by centers.
- o The environment was also hurt when fewer opportunities were available for solar energy conservation features in high density projects built inside centers. Local water bills became very costly when statewide projects were defeated. Water conservation opportunities afforded by increased density in centers were lost causing everyone to pay more for their water. Continued development on the fringe of the city caused valuable open space to be preempted for construction. The elimination of this open space further worsened already serious air pollution and limited expansion of existing and proposed mountain recreation areas.
- o Finally, Los Angeles lost any opportunity to develop an attractive and distinctive visual appearance that centers would have created. The activities, excitement, color and public attention that could have been generated by centers was lost. What remained was a city without character or distinction, a city in search of its real self.



Because the centers concept. . . developed during the 1960's and 1970's. . . was not implemented during the 1980's, the quality of life in Los Angeles during the 1980's and 1990's suffered. By not translating the centers concept -- a paper plan -- into reality, the real potential to preserve and enhance our life-style was lost. Los Angeles had missed a last minute and probably irreplaceable opportunity to develop a unique and distinctive City.

While the above "History" may. . . to some. . . sound like an overly pessimistic prediction, it is not, but, what is more important it is a history we can prevent. With everyone's help, this "History" is avoidable. As tough, controversial and probabilistic as implementing the centers concept is bound to be, it holds the best promise for avoiding the above "History".

For more information on the Centers Implementation Program, please contact: Jon Perica, Frank Parrello or Murph Miller at 485-3864 in the Los Angeles City Planning Department, Room 504, City Hall.

0614w/0026w

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



C124880912